

THE SCALE OF STATISM: A FRAMEWORK FOR RANKING SOCIOECONOMIC SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the scale of statism, a framework for understanding and ranking socioeconomic systems, and demonstrates that, contrary to academic and popular belief, today’s economies are not capitalist (i.e., market economies). Instead, existing economies—including the United States, the stronghold of “capitalism”—are statist. The article includes a philosophical and analytical framework; an explanation of the six socioeconomic systems on the scale (free-market capitalism, crony capitalism, mixed economy, economic fascism, democratic socialism, and Marxist socialism); and a diagram of the scale, with Angola as a case study.

Prevailing ideologies are many: capitalism, socialism, fascism, mercantilism, and more. One hears about left, right, center, center-left, center-right. There are the social market economy, economics this, and economics that. With this many labels floating around, clarification is undoubtedly needed for a sounder and broader understanding of socioeconomic systems. Even intellectuals need clarity, let alone policy makers and the public.

Despite the many ideological labels, socioeconomic systems can essentially be organized into two models: consent or coercion. Almost all countries have a mix of both, but existing systems are considerably tilted toward the coercive (i.e., government control and command). Said differently, a human society can be either a free-market economy or a statist economy.

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As a socioeconomic system, the free-market approach is transparent, timeless, and universal in its offering: human beings are individuals who have natural rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership. Thus, social cooperation and economic coordination transpire voluntarily through free markets, free trade, and free enterprise so as not to infringe on these fundamental rights. The same cannot be said of statist socioeconomic systems. Of course, there are different and overlapping versions of statist economies. The common denominator is that the state acts as the manager of social and economic affairs through a coercive, top-down approach and a large bureaucratic apparatus.

Amid a sea of ideologies, economic schools of thought, and economic miseducation, one economic system seems to unite most politicians, academics, commentators, and much of the public in repudiation of it: free-market capitalism. Capitalism is so disparaged that socialism remains popular in the West, including in the U.S. (James 2019). Moreover, as the economic situation deteriorates, capitalism tends to be blamed for problems caused by state intervention.

However, contrary to established academic and popular consensus, existing economies are not capitalist societies (i.e., market economies), as they are state driven and not market driven. Thus, the blame capitalism gets for past injustices and present economic, social, and environmental woes is unfounded. The explanation for why capitalism is blamed is lengthy and complex; a brief attempt follows.

First, governments control the education system, where most curricula tend to, overtly or covertly, promote state-favoring views while misrepresenting capitalism (Hackley 2019). By the time most of us complete schooling, we are conditioned mainly by statist views. The progovernment bias in schools and universities leads to a generalized misunderstanding and misrepresentation of capitalism (i.e., the market system) and persistent anticapitalist sentiments. Pro-state indoctrination is even more prevalent in countries that have or have had authoritarian regimes.

Second, one cannot overestimate the role media outlets play in shaping public opinion in favor of government control and intervention. The press, too, plays a crucial role in fostering the prevailing confusion about and misrepresentation of capitalism while, perhaps inadvertently, shaping public opinion to see the state as the source of order and progress.

Third, Western countries self-branded as free-market capitalists while not practicing free-market capitalism either at home or abroad as imperialist, colonial, or neocolonial powers. Western governments have consistently intervened in their own economies. Still, capitalism is blamed for the failures and atrocities of state interventions. Also, most people, including Westerners, tend to equate capitalism with imperialism because Western powers have been imperialist while branded as capitalist.

This fact may come as a shock or surprise: the United States, the world's leading economy and stronghold of "capitalism," is not a (free-market) capitalist economy. It never has been, let alone European and other economies. For example, Patrick Newman (2021, 13) introduces his book *Cronyism: Liberty versus Power in Early America, 1607–1849* as "an economic and political history of early America, describing government policies and their effects on marketplace activity. In particular, it is a history of cronyism: when the government passes policies to benefit special-interest politicians, bureaucrats, businesses, and other groups at the expense of the general public." Similarly, Richard Ebeling (2014) clarifies that "the ideal and the principle of the free-market economy, of capitalism rightly understood were never fulfilled. What is called 'capitalism' today is a distorted, twisted, and deformed system of increasingly limited market relationships, as well as market processes hampered and repressed by state controls and regulations."

Capitalism (i.e., the market economy) does not exist anywhere. Some countries (e.g., the United States, among others) have come closest to it and thus developed and prospered greatly. Still, the capitalist system has yet to be correctly implemented. So past and present injustices must be blamed not on capitalism but on state interventionism. It would be tremendously beneficial to world peace and prosperity if we stopped referring to present socioeconomic systems as capitalist and started referring to them as what they are: statist economies. This article presents the scale of statism, a framework for understanding and ranking socioeconomic systems. It also demonstrates that we live in statist, not capitalist, economies.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The scale of statism is ordinal, a categorical ranking indicating the extent to which the state intervenes and controls the economy

and society—how statist an economy is. The scale goes from 1 to 6, where 1 is free-market capitalism, also known as a free society or a free-market economy; 2 is crony capitalism; 3 is a mixed economy, also known as a social market economy; 4 is economic fascism; 5 is democratic socialism; and, finally, 6 is the most oppressed society, a Marxist-socialist economy under a totalitarian dictatorship.

Note that statist systems have overlapping features, and most of them can be quite a messy cocktail of economic concepts in and of themselves. For example, a mixed economy can have elements of mercantilism, protectionism, corporatism, and free-market capitalism. Some mixed economies may also have a touch of police state (i.e., mass surveillance and censorship). This should be kept in mind going forward.

Individual Rights

Human societies are predicated on the fact that people are individuals who have natural rights and on the corresponding obligations of the nonaggression principle. Indeed, history has proved that individuality can never be abolished, even under the most repressive regimes implementing collectivist ideologies (e.g., North Korea, Mao's China, and Stalin's Soviet Union). However, despite the remarkable progress made regarding human rights, the world still has a long way to go in genuinely acknowledging and respecting individual rights.

The fundamental human rights are simply three: life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership. All other rights (e.g., freedoms of speech, privacy, association, and disassociation) are necessarily part of and emanate from the three fundamental rights.

The right to life is, of course, the first and most sacrosanct of individual rights. It is premised on the ethical-moral law that one should not kill, as one would not wish to be killed. That individuals have the right to life and that no one and no entity, not even the state, is permitted to infringe upon this right is instinctively known. It must be noted, however, that the state, in theory the protector of people's rights, has in practice been the primary violator of individual rights—starting with the right to life—in history, as documented by Rudolph J. Rummel (1997) in his seminal book *Death by Government: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900*. Rummel (2017) points out that

during this [twentieth] century's wars, there were some 38 million battle deaths, but almost four times more people—at least 170 million—were killed by governments for ethnic, racial, tribal, religious, or political reasons. I call this phenomenon democide, meaning that authoritarian and totalitarian governments are more deadly than war.

Liberty is the second individual right. The fact that freedom is a fundamental human right is well documented. From the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights to today's constitutions, the right to liberty is well established and universally acknowledged. For example, the United Nations' (1948) "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" stipulates in Article 1, "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience [emphasis added] and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*" Furthermore, Article 3 asserts, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Regarding the right to (self and property) ownership, suffice it to pose the following question: Who owns a person's body—the person herself, the person's parents, the village chief, the king, the government, or the dictator? If the reader's answer is that a person's body is unequivocally owned by the person herself and by no other person, group of persons, or artificial political authority (e.g., the state), then the reader is correct. Because if parents, the tribal chief, the king, the state, or the dictator were the rightful owner of a person's body, then the person would be a slave owned by another person or an entity such as the state.

Being human implies self-ownership. Individuality indicates and requires self-ownership. How could people be free if they were not their body's natural and rightful owner? There is no individual freedom, autonomy, or self-governance without self-ownership. There is no justice where the right to self (and property) ownership is partially or fully repressed. If one acknowledges the rights to life and liberty, one must necessarily admit individual self-ownership as a natural and unalienable human right, as they are inextricably linked.

Since each person is individually the incontestable owner of his body, the fruits of a person's labor are logically that person's property. For example, if a person finds himself stranded in an isolated forest, he will need to find something to eat in order to survive. Let us say the person found a wild fruit tree. Since no person planted the tree there, it is thus a gift (i.e., a resource) from

nature. The ten fruits the person collects using his body (and time) are thus his property. He wholly owns those ten fruits. If this person produces a spear (i.e., a capital good) from a tree branch (i.e., a natural resource), the spear is his property in full—as is the wild deer (i.e., a consumer good) he hunts with his spear.

The takeaway is this: people own their bodies and time, and consequently the fruit of their labor is their private property, be it a spear, a boat, a salary, a business, a house, rightfully acquired land, or other things. Ultimately, the right to property ownership stems from individuals' owning their bodies, time, and labor. Logically, one owns what one creates, produces, invents, and legitimately acquires (e.g., through trade, gift, or inheritance). The right to self (and property) ownership is just as fundamental as the rights to life and liberty. Unfortunately, this crucial fact remains mostly unknown or disregarded in our statist world, where governments act as owners of their citizens' lives and bodies through paternalistic, encroaching, and coercive regulations.

Human Nature

Humans are inherently rational and purposeful beings. Unlike other physical existences (e.g., animals, the moon, and the stars), we can reason and act purposefully toward achieving a chosen immediate or long-term goal. Conscience and logical reasoning set us apart from other physical existences. This does not mean, however, that human deduction, logical reasoning, and cognitive ability are infallible. Still, humans are inherently rational and purposeful beings.

For example, the reader chooses to allocate a portion of his time right now to read this article. From that, we can establish that the reader prefers, at this moment, to read this article and then, say, watch TV. From this, we can prove that the reader values reading "The Scale of Statism" more than watching TV at this time. From this, we can further establish that the reader puts self-education over self-indulgence at this time. Another example considers that people brush their teeth every day not necessarily because they like it so much but because the result of not doing so is costly in monetary, health, and aesthetic terms. People rationally and purposefully choose to avoid this expense, pain, and discomfort through daily oral hygiene.

Economist and social philosopher Ludwig von Mises, in *Human Action* (1998, 11), notes that "human action is purposeful behavior.

Or we may say: Action is will put into operation and transformed into an agency, is aiming at ends and goals, is the ego's meaningful response to stimuli and to the conditions of its environment, is a person's conscious adjustment to the state of the universe that determines his life." Such is human nature—free will, conscience, logical reasoning, and purposeful action.

Human Society

Human beings are individuals—not necessarily individualistic, but individuals, nonetheless. This natural and immutable fact may seem too obvious to point out here; however, it must always be pointed out, especially considering that collectivist (and authoritarian) ideologies remain popular today. One cannot repeat too often that people are individuals, because of this fact's social and economic implications and because public policy must reflect this fact in order to be more just.

As individuals, we have characteristics such as fingerprints that are uniquely ours. Even identical twins are two separate individuals with distinct features, abilities, and preferences. Out of eight billion or more people on the earth, there are eight billion or more individuals with unmatched biological, genetic, and physiological attributes that are uniquely theirs. Any society, tribal or modern, large or small, is merely a combination of families, which in turn are combinations of individuals. Human society is, therefore, nothing more than a combination of individuals living in a territory who tend to share standard links (e.g., language, culture, and ethnicity).

It is a prevailing but fatal misconception to see society as a separate entity above and beyond individuals. This philosophical error has led to the outburst of collectivist ideologies (e.g., socialism and fascism) that have led to some of the most tyrannical and murderous systems of government this world has ever seen, as documented in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Courtois 1999) and many other scholarly works. The tragedy of collectivist regimes across the world that started with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922 was a consequence, not a coincidence, of the notion and practice of placing the "greater good" of society (i.e., a group of individuals) over and above the rights of the individuals who compose it. As sound economic theory shows and history proves, collectivism—the

suppression of individuality and individual rights—is an ideological hallmark of cruel and oppressive regimes.

So it is crucial to recognize that society over and outside the individuals who compose it does not exist. To think otherwise is a fallacy and a dangerous misconception. Acknowledging and respecting the fact that individuals have a natural right to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership that must not be infringed under the pretext of a politically defined “greater good” is vital to preventing the rise of tyrannical systems of government and thus maintaining structural justice in society. It is equally crucial to realize that the individual and the family precede the concepts of community, society, kingdom, and country. The individual and the family also predate all artificial authorities (i.e., the first village chief, the first king, the first government, and the first dictator). Logically, therefore, the individual and the family antecede all artificial laws.

To reiterate, society above and outside the individuals who compose it does not exist. A society, civilization, nation, state, or nation-state that exists today may not exist tomorrow. However, individuals and families will remain. Consequently, the individual rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership are natural and inherent. They do not come from the generosity of the state, although the state can protect or violate these fundamental rights.

Statism

The widespread belief that the United States and much of the world are market economies is one of our time’s most significant (and detrimental) economic fallacies—a misconception that is perpetuated either out of willful ignorance or because doing so serves state interests. The latter is likely the case. However, today’s economies are not market economies (i.e., capitalist). This is the fundamental problem underlying current social and economic woes.

Today’s economies are statist. Statism is a political system where the state has considerable centralized control over social and economic affairs (i.e., people’s lives). A statist socioeconomic system is one where the government, through a cohort of elected and unelected officials, plays the leading role in centrally (and technocratically) planning, controlling, and commanding the economy and society. Governments today have substantial centralized control and steering power over the economy and

society; undoubtedly, we live in statist economies of varying state control and intervention levels. The predominant model is the mixed, or social market, economy. Western countries and most of the world fall into this category.

Summary

To recapitulate, this article's analytical framework and the scale of statism are grounded on these axiomatic facts:

1. People are individuals who have natural—God-given, if one prefers—rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership. These three fundamental rights are inherent to the human person and precede all artificial laws and authorities (e.g., the first tribal chief, the first king, the first government, and the first dictator).
2. Humans are inherently rational and purposeful beings. Unlike animals and other physical existences, we are capable of deduction, logical reasoning, and purposeful actions.
3. Human beings are individuals—not necessarily individualistic, but individuals. This is a natural and immutable fact. Hence, human society, tribal or modern, large or small, is merely a combination of individuals.
4. Existing economies are statist, not capitalist. Statism is a system where the state has considerable centralized control and commanding power over social and economic affairs.

THE SCALE OF STATISM

The six socioeconomic systems on the scale of statism are introduced below: free-market capitalism (stage 1), crony capitalism (stage 2), mixed economy (stage 3), economic fascism (stage 4), democratic socialism (stage 5), and Marxist socialism (stage 6).

1. Free-Market Capitalism

Free-market capitalism is the morally, socially, and economically superior framework for organizing human society because it is the socioeconomic system that least violates and most upholds people's natural rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership. Moreover, since the individual, the family, and human society precede the first tribal chief, the first king, the first government,

and the first dictator—and thus all artificial laws—it follows that the market system (i.e., free markets, free enterprise, and free trade) is the initial and therefore the natural socioeconomic system.

The great thinker Frédéric Bastiat (1998, 1–2) writes in *The Law* that

life, faculties, production—in other words, individuality, liberty, property—this is man. And in spite of the cunning of artful political leaders, these three gifts from God precede all human legislation, and are superior to it. Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place.

Indeed, free markets, free enterprise, and free trade naturally predate the concept of nation-state and state intervention. Notice that government, or the state, is an artificial and relatively new construct. Historian of political theory Luigi Bassani and political philosopher Carlo Lottieri (2021) note that “whether we see its cradle in the Italian system of States after the Peace of Lodi (1454), or in western Europe (Spain, France, and England) in the 1600s, one thing is clear: the State ‘gradually emerged in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and found its first mature form in the seventeenth’ (Lubasz 1964).”

As remarked earlier, existing economies, even the United States, are statist, not capitalist (i.e., market economy). Mises (1998, 258) offers an excellent market economy definition that fits here:

The market economy is the social system of the division of labor under private ownership of the means of production. Everybody acts on his own behalf; but everybody’s actions aim at the satisfaction of other people’s needs as well as at the satisfaction of his own. Everybody in acting serves his fellow citizens. Everybody, on the other hand, is served by his fellow citizens. Everybody is both a means and an end in himself, an ultimate end for himself and a means to other people in their endeavors to attain their own ends.

Similarly, Henry Hazlitt (2019), clarifies,

There are basically only two ways in which economic life can be organized. The first is by the voluntary choice of families and individuals and by voluntary cooperation. This arrangement has come to be known as the free market. The other is by the orders of a dictator. This is a command economy. In its more extreme form, when an organized state expropriates the means of production, it is called socialism or communism. Economic life must be primarily organized by one system or the other.

It can, of course, be a mixture, as it unfortunately is in most nations today. But the mixture tends to be unstable. If it is a mixture of a free and a coerced economy the coerced section tends constantly to increase.

Most people notice that the current system, incorrectly referred to as capitalism, is cruel and oppressive. Thus, many tend to advocate state intervention or outright socialism as an alternative that serves and empowers the people. Unfortunately, however, they fail to comprehend that the existing socioeconomic system is highly statist as it is and that free-market capitalism is the system that truly empowers individuals and families (i.e., the people). Statist socioeconomic systems disenfranchise individuals and families while empowering government officials, favored businesses, and associates.

Also, many mistakenly believe that free-market capitalism is about racism, greed, the wealthy, or exploitation. On the contrary, the market economy is about individual rights, free choice, voluntary cooperation, free enterprise, and free trade of goods and services. Moreover, the market system is about the division of labor and peaceful, not forceful, relations among people who, in pursuit of their own goals, serve, not coerce, others. Such is the essence of the market economy.

In a free-market economy, anyone from any background can rise from the very bottom to the very top, not by bribing, being of higher birth, or colluding with government officials to gain special favors, but by being entrepreneurial and providing products or services in open and competitive markets to people who voluntarily choose to buy (or not). On the other hand, the wealthiest entrepreneur can lose market dominance and wealth over time: no bailout or corporate welfare. With grit and entrepreneurial vision, the poorest person can rise to become the richest by serving others, not by robbing or coercing. Such is the nature, beauty, and justice of the market economy.

Furthermore, the free-market economy is the superior form of democracy. Though hardly understood, the free-market system is more democratic than illiberal and liberal democracies. In existing democracies, for example, the people holding state power can vote and enact laws to brutalize another group within society (e.g., Jim Crow United States and apartheid South Africa). Atrocities and injustices perpetrated by democratic government systems could not have happened in a free-market society. Why? Because, as

discussed in the analytical framework, a free-market society is grounded on the fact that all, not only some, human beings have a natural right to life, liberty, and (self- and property) ownership and on the corresponding obligations of the nonaggression principle.

In closing, as sound economic theory shows and history proves, the free-market economy is morally, sociologically, socially, and economically superior to the available alternatives.

2. Crony Capitalism

As the first and thus mildest form of statism, crony capitalism is the first step in the deviation from free-market capitalism. Crony capitalism, or simply cronyism is the stage where statism begins; it is an economic arrangement where the state begins to intervene in the economy and mount its bureaucratic apparatus of regulations (e.g., tariffs, licenses, permits, and other bureaucratic tools) aimed at controlling and restricting certain economic activities, usually under the banner of “protecting” consumers or “safeguarding” specific sectors and industries. Crony capitalism is where the injustice of government picking of winners and losers begins.

Noble-sounding words almost always wrap the justification for state intervention. Unfortunately, however, promises and official narratives in politics tend to be disconnected from real intentions. Moreover, politics is a game of trickery, given that rulers, politicians, and bureaucrats are not particularly famous for honesty and transparency. While initial state interventions are lauded as necessary to correct “market failures” or to bring about a “better” or “fairer” economic outcome, history shows that the reality is that such interventions tend to be counterproductive and represent a coup against consumers and small to medium-sized businesses in favor of large businesses, special interests, and bureaucrats.

Daren Bakst (2021) notes that

cronyism takes many forms, but ultimately the effect is the government picking winners and losers, such as through subsidies to prop up a government-favored industry (e.g., for electric vehicles) or regulations that create barriers to entry for new competitors in an industry (such as state occupational licensing laws). Those actions are taken at the expense of competition and innovation. Even worse, by their very nature, they don't account for the overall public interest. Instead, they benefit a small, favored interest at the expense of everyone else, from taxpayers and consumers to other businesses.

In a crony capitalist society, the government uses its regulatory and coercive power to steer economic activity and even sectors in the direction the ruling political entity decides. Therefore, this arrangement breeds economic repression, injustice, and corruption that tend to permeate society. Newman (2021, 14) points out that

those who control the government’s power are corrupted over time. To quote Lord Acton, “[P]ower tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” I define corruption as the willingness of government officials to push for interventions that benefit themselves and other favored interests. Coercion and the use of force increase the ability to dispense favors, which incentivizes corruption.

Undoubtedly, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually on lobbying government officials to gain government favors. For example, in the United States, lobbying spending reached an all-time high of \$3.73 billion in 2021 (Statista 2022), and “3,700 new companies and organizations hired lobbyists since the start of the pandemic” (O’Connell and Narayanswamy 2022).

As the first step in the deviation from free-market capitalism and the beginning of statism, crony capitalism is an arrangement where the government, big business, and special interests start colluding to gain further wealth and more concentrated political power. The more interventionist a government is, the more corruption, lobbying, rent seeking, favoritism, wealthy politicians, protectionism, corporate welfare, and concentration of political and economic power, among other ills, a society will tend to have.

3. Mixed Economy

Next on the scale of statism is the mixed economy, also known as the social market economy or the third way. As the name suggests, this statist system seeks a middle ground between free-market capitalism and socialism that, allegedly, combines the best elements of both systems while avoiding the downsides of each. The mixed-economy approach sounds terrific and noble in theory. After all, who would not want the best of both worlds while avoiding the disadvantages of each?

In practice, however, the mixed economy is an unsustainable and unworkable arrangement for three reasons:

1. The theoretical middle point cannot be determined.

2. Given that the middle point cannot be determined and defined, it cannot be maintained either. If the history of government is guidance, we can state that the natural tendency is for government to gain more, not less, control and command of the economy.
3. Politicians tend to make ever more unreasonable but alluring promises to get into office. Since the public is economically illiterate, the mixed economy will move away from the fictitious middle area and gravitate toward more state interventionism.

In *The Middle of the Road Leads to Socialism*, Mises (2018) clarifies,

Interventionism cannot be considered as an economic system destined to stay. It is a method for the transformation of capitalism into socialism by a series of successive steps. It is as such different from the endeavors of the communists to bring about socialism at one stroke. The difference does not refer to the ultimate end of the political movement; it refers mainly to the tactics to be resorted to for the attainment of an end that both groups are aiming at.

The mixed economy, or social market economy, is the prevailing system in Western countries and, therefore, in much of the world. The precarious monetary, economic, and social situation becoming increasingly apparent in most countries reveals the mixed model as dysfunctional and chaotic. As Mises points out, it is a system that cannot last and that leads to even more state interventions and, potentially, socialism. It is no coincidence that existing economies are characterized by systemic debt, deficit spending, heavy taxation, inflation, bubbles, and more frequent crises, among other issues. For instance, government intervention created the (so far) \$1.6 trillion student debt bubble (Shermer 2021) and drove higher education costs sky-high in the U.S. (Kittredge 2018). This market distortion, like other crises, is blamed on capitalism when interventionism is the real culprit. Unaware that the student debt crisis is a creature of state intervention, with the central bank in the background, the public and many politicians demand more state intervention to “solve” a problem caused by state intervention.

Speaking of central bank in the background, notice that a central bank is incompatible with free-market capitalism. Notice also that a central bank is one of the most important institutions of statist economies. Central banking and statism are inextricably linked. Jörg Guido Hülsmann (2021) notes that early nineteenth-century socialists/statists

understood that the economy of a country could be controlled particularly easily and safely with the help of the printing press [central bank]. A few years later, the demand for the “centralization of credit in the hands of the state through a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly” soon also held center stage in the 1848 Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels.

Bureaucracy is noticeable and cumbersome in a mixed economy. The state has amassed for itself an overarching and far-reaching bureaucratic apparatus of control and intervention. The government no longer intervenes here and there in this or that sector; instead, it significantly controls and commands social and economic activity with regulations. In this statist arrangement, interventionism benefits political elites, large businesses, and special interest groups at the expense of taxpayers and to the detriment of society to a greater extent than in the previous system of crony capitalism.

As an economic system drifts from the free-market economy, power, profit, and privilege are ultimately concentrated in the hands of the top few to the detriment of economic development and broader prosperity.

4. Economic Fascism

In the drift away from free-market capitalism, state interventionism becomes economically fascist after crony capitalism and the mixed economy. Although fascists do not outright ban private property rights and do reject Marxist socialism, the economic nature of fascism is essentially socialist, given the high degree of centralized control and command of the economy. The definition of economic fascism may vary, but what does not vary is the fact that it is a collectivist ideology and thus rejects the free-market economy. Benito Mussolini, the leader of the first fascist state, was originally a member of the Italian Socialist Party, and Nazi Germany’s ideology was called National Socialism. Emmanuel Rincón (2021) notes that

practically everyone knows that Karl Marx is the ideological father of communism and socialism and that Adam Smith is the father of capitalism and economic liberalism. Do you know, in contrast, who the mind behind fascism is? It’s very likely that you don’t, and I can tell you in advance that the philosopher behind fascism was also an avowed socialist. Giovanni Gentile, a neo-Hegelian philosopher, was the intellectual author of the “doctrine of fascism,” which he wrote in

conjunction with Benito Mussolini. Gentile's sources of inspiration were thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and also Karl Marx. Gentile went so far as to declare "Fascism is a form of socialism, in fact, it is its most viable form." One of the most common reflections on this is that fascism is itself socialism based on national identity.

Similarly, Sheldon Richman (2019) points out,

As an economic system, fascism is socialism with a capitalist veneer. The word derives from *fascēs*, the Roman symbol of collectivism and power: a tied bundle of rods with a protruding ax. . . .

Where socialism sought totalitarian control of a society's economic processes through direct state operation of the means of production, fascism sought that control indirectly, through domination of nominally private owners. Where socialism nationalized property explicitly, fascism did so implicitly by requiring owners to use their property in the "national interest"—that is, as the autocratic authority conceived it. (Nevertheless, a few industries were operated by the state.)

In a way, what differentiates a fascist economy from a mixed economy is that in the latter, the state still has respect for private property rights and shows appreciation for some free markets, despite having considerable centralized control and command of the economy. A common feature between a fascist socioeconomic system and today's mixed economies is the collusion between government and corporations; both systems have strong corporatist and protectionist elements in them. In today's mixed-economy systems of state interventionism, for example, many corporations are deemed "systemically important" or "too big to fail." Hence, many companies are protected and helped by governments with taxpayer money (i.e., bailouts) and regulatory favors.

Does this mean most economies today are fascist? No. It must be noted, however, that some of the authoritarian socioeconomic systems in the developing world are *unwittingly* fascist. Western economies are drifting toward more state control and intervention, which means further away from free-market capitalism and toward economic fascism. Even though Western economies are not necessarily fascist, they contain elements of economic fascism, as most economies today do. In the developing world, however, where many economies are under authoritarian regimes, there certainly are economic systems that are unwittingly fascist.

The threat of economic fascism exists. Llewellyn Rockwell (2022) warns,

Everyone knows that the term fascist is a pejorative, often used to describe any political position a speaker doesn't like. There isn't anyone around who is willing to stand up and say, "I'm a fascist; I think fascism is a great social and economic system." But I submit that if they were honest, the vast majority of politicians, intellectuals, and political activists would have to say just that. Fascism is the system of government that cartelizes the private sector, centrally plans the economy to subsidize producers, exalts the police state as the source of order, denies fundamental rights and liberties to individuals, and makes the executive state the unlimited master of society.

5. Democratic Socialism

Democratic socialism seems to be as popular as it is vague. If one polls ten or ten million self-declared democratic socialists, one will hardly get a consistent and cogent definition. Even the two most famous democratic socialists, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders and U.S. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, give different definitions of democratic socialism. A quick web search shows that when defining it, they start by saying, "What democratic socialism means to me . . ."—not what democratic socialism *is*, but what it means to them. That is a red flag. Because there is not a cogent and generally agreed upon definition of democratic socialism, the definition is ever bending and relative to an individual or a group of individuals, time, and space. This kind of relativism and opaqueness is dangerous, as a loosely defined socioeconomic system may be a platform for a tyrannical regime in sheep's clothing.

Given that Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez is the current superstar of democratic socialism and a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the largest socialist organization in the United States, a visit to their website in pursuit of a cogent definition seemed in order. The DSA website (Democratic Socialists of America, n.d.) defines democratic socialism as follows:

Capitalism is a system designed by the owning class to exploit the rest of us for their own profit. We must replace it with democratic socialism, a system where ordinary people have a real voice in our workplaces, neighborhoods, and society. We believe there are many avenues that feed into the democratic road to socialism. Our vision pushes further than historic social democracy and leaves behind authoritarian visions of socialism in the dustbin of history.

We want a democracy that creates space for us all to flourish, not just survive and answers the fundamental questions of our lives with the input of all. We want to collectively own the key economic drivers that dominate our lives, such as energy production and transportation. We

want the multiracial working class united in solidarity instead of divided by fear. We want to win “radical” reforms like single-payer Medicare for All, defunding the police/refunding communities, the Green New Deal, and more as a transition to a freer, more just life.

We want a democracy powered by everyday people. The capitalist class tells us we are powerless, but together we can take back control.

The DSA itself does not define how democratic socialism would look and work as a socioeconomic system. Besides, there are so many fallacies in the above definition that it could take a whole book to debunk all of them in detail. Still, a few are worth addressing here.

First, “Capitalism is a system designed by the owning class to exploit the rest of us for their own profit” is an entirely false statement. Capitalism was not and could not have been designed by the “owning class” because free markets, free trade, and free enterprise are natural and predate artificial constructs such as a king or a government. Moreover, the “owning class” (i.e., political elites, business elites, and corporate and other interest groups) disfavor free-market capitalism because it empowers the individual and does not grant them special licenses, protection, subsidies, and other state-given benefits.

Second, a critical piece of information that underpins the DSA’s definition of democratic socialism is “We want to collectively own the key economic drivers that dominate our lives,” by which they mean they want to collectively own (and control) the means of production and distribution of goods and services—nothing new under the sun. In reality, “collectively own the key economic drivers that dominate our lives” is the very socialist socioeconomic system that has been tried all over the world and has miserably failed. It is also the same socialist economy where ownership is collective in theory, but in practice the state alone owns and controls all relevant factors of production. Furthermore, it is the very socialist socioeconomic system that requires force, violence, and a police state to be maintained.

Democratic socialists are not so different from Marxist socialists (the totalitarians) in that they are both statist groups who seek to abolish people’s natural individual rights to liberty and (self and property) ownership. As historical evidence shows, under socialist socioeconomic systems individuals are powerless, are essentially slaves to the proletariat government (i.e., the dictatorship), and

are without property rights. Also, by abolishing private property rights, democratic socialists abolish individual human rights altogether. This is so because (self and property) ownership is the pillar that ultimately sustains all individual rights.

Third, the DSA asserts, “We want a democracy powered by everyday people.” Fair enough. Most people would want that. The difference is that, unlike democratic socialists and others, some realize that the only socioeconomic system that is powered by and thus truly empowers everyday people is a free-market economy. Statist socioeconomic systems, by default, empower the state and its associates to the detriment of ordinary people.

This brings us to the democracy part of democratic socialism. Democratic socialists like to emphasize that they are democratic and not authoritarian or totalitarian. Perhaps they indeed are democratic. However, a crucial point democratic socialists fail to understand is that it does not matter whether a socialist economy is implemented democratically, as in the case of Venezuela, or by force and violence, as in the case of the Soviet Union. The fact remains that the socialist economic system itself is an unworkable utopia that requires force and violence to implement, and a tyrannical regime to maintain. A socialist system, democratic or otherwise, is inherently cruel and oppressive, as it severely violates people’s individual rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership.

In this vein, Jacob Hornberger (2022) points out that

democracy is often confused with the concept of freedom. If a system is democratic, the argument goes, that shows that people are free. That’s ludicrous. Freedom has nothing to do with how people elect their rulers. Consider Latin America, for example, the part of the world that was the focus of that recent Summit of the Americas. It’s often said, with validity, that people in Latin America have the freedom to elect their dictators every four or six years. That’s because their rulers wield and exercise dictatorial powers. So, whoever gets the most votes is the one who gets to be the dictator.

Indeed, a cruel and oppressive system is still a cruel and oppressive system even if a democratically elected government inflicts the tyranny, as is the case in many countries today. What matters is not that the people get to vote and elect who will head a tyrannical system. What matters is that a system is not tyrannical, that the government, elected or not, respects the fundamental rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership. As the

past and present show, many oppressive regimes used and use democracy as a legitimizing veil over their tyrannical nature.

When pressed, prominent democratic socialists conveniently ignore Venezuela and point to Scandinavian countries as proof that their system works. However, no Scandinavian country is socialist, and more importantly, no Scandinavian country became wealthy because of socialist policies. Scandinavian countries have a large welfare state and high taxes, but they also have well-established elements of free-market capitalism (e.g., property rights, openness, economic freedom, entrepreneurship, and free trade). Speaking at the Kennedy School of Government in 2015, Danish prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen publicly rebuked repeated statements from U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders that Denmark is what he means by democratic socialism, saying: “I know that some people in the U.S. associate the Nordic model with some sort of socialism. Therefore, I would like to make one thing clear. Denmark is far from a socialist planned economy. Denmark is a market economy” (Goldhill 2015). Likewise, Nima Sanandaji (2021) clarifies,

Much of the strength of Nordic societies lies in the advanced free market system, which is why it’s essential that they are returning to their centrist roots. As I have previously written with Klas Tikkanen, chief operating officer of Nordic Capital, Sweden is a leading innovation hub in Europe that’s able to attract foreign capital to growing companies. One reason for this success is its smart tax policy, where funds from a successful investment in one company may be invested in new companies, and taxation only applies when gains are realized. Thus, growth capital can be attracted to a high-tax country.

An actual case of democratic socialism is Venezuela under the late President Hugo Chávez and his successor, President Nicolás Maduro. Believing that they could use oil money to usher in “21st-century socialism” (Chávez’s own words [Forero 2005]), Presidents Chávez and Maduro ended up destroying the Venezuelan economy into what is now an economic disaster and humanitarian crisis (Thomson 2021). The disastrous, government-induced hyperinflationary collapse of democratic socialist Venezuela again proves socialism to be a ruinous and unworkable system, even if one sits on the world’s largest proven oil reserves, as Venezuela does.

So no goodness, justice, and prosperity can come out of socialism simply because it is implemented democratically and not violently.

It is naïve to believe that democratic socialists, unlike Marxist socialists, will finally deliver a socialist paradise here on earth. Democratic or not, socialism remains a fascinating economic concept that, in practice, results in tyrannical rule, poverty, and misery.¹

6. Marxist Socialism

Marxist socialism is the harshest of the statist socioeconomic systems and the last on the scale of statism. The oppression, horrors, and brutality of Marxist-socialist regimes are well documented, so we will keep this part of the article as brief as possible. Born and raised in Angola, then the People's Republic of Angola, the author has seen the tyrannical and destructive nature of such systems.

This system has different names: communism, international socialism, sovietism, Marxism-Leninism, and bolshevism. A Marxist-socialist economic system is characterized by complete state ownership and control of the economy. Under this system, private property rights are abolished, all land is ultimately and exclusively owned by the state, and economic activity is centrally planned and commanded by the state—all of which results in a highly centralized and severely repressed economy, usually under a totalitarian government.

In theory, socialism is collective ownership, but in practice it is a system of state ownership veiled as public ownership. The word “public” is essential to this ploy because it helps maintain the illusion of public ownership. However, the state, personified by a president or supreme leader, has all the power, owns all the land, and controls almost everything and everyone through censorship, surveillance, propaganda, coercion, violence, and other means that comprise the state apparatus of repression. Despite being the most cruel, oppressive, and murderous system of government in human

¹ The reader may ask how the author explains the People's Republic of China's economic transformation. It is undeniable that China's economic development has been remarkable. However, it does not mean socialism finally works or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) invented a new socioeconomic system. Not at all. China's economic success was because the CCP, under Deng Xiaoping, considering the catastrophic failure of Mao's radical socialist policies, made the pragmatic (and correct) decision to initiate pro-market economy reforms. In other words, China prospered because of the degree to which it embraced capitalism and international trade while maintaining a party-state regime. The CCP's relative embrace of the market economy to survive and thrive was a brilliant strategic move and an unwitting admission that socialism does not work.

history (Satter 2017), Marxist socialism remains popular, even in the Western world. Anton Balint (2022) notes that

poll after poll, conducted over the years and across different Western countries—such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, New Zealand, and other nations that share the two pillars of Western civilization—have shown that those below the age of 35 support socialism, with a startling number of young people living in the UK believing in 2018 that “communism could have worked if it had been better executed.”

As such, many young Westerners continue to have a romantic view about international socialism (communism), often expressed in apologetic slogans such as the well-known “that was not real communism,” aimed at whitewashing Marx’s ideology that has been responsible for over 100 million deaths over the past 100 years.

Similarly, Ebeling (2021) explains,

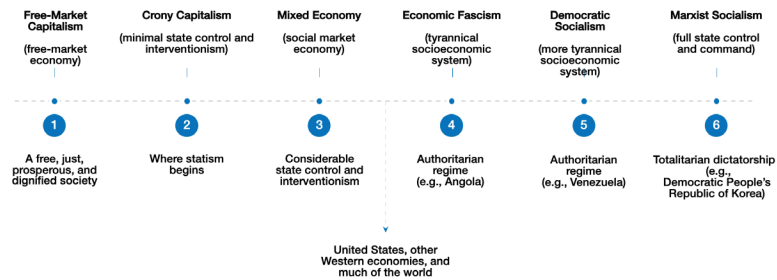
Thirty years ago this month, the nightmare experiment in Soviet communism formally came to an end. On the evening of December 25, 1991, the red flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was lowered from the walls of the Kremlin in Moscow for the last time. After almost 75 years, the communist nightmare was over. Begun in the midst of the First World War with the Bolshevik Revolution led by Vladimir Lenin in November of 1917, it has been estimated that upwards of over 60 million people died as the intentional victims of building the bright, beautiful socialist future. Worked to death, starved to death, tortured to death, or simply shot, each of these innocent and unarmed men, women, and children were declared to be “enemies of the people,” somehow standing in the way of constructing the collectivist utopia-to-come.

Along with their overly cruel and oppressive nature, Marxist-socialist systems tend to come with the deification of the state and a fanatical cult of personality around the leader, who personifies the state. Much more so than under any other statist system, established religions are banned or repressed, as the state requires complete submission and subservience. In the case of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the dictator himself is worshiped as godlike (Roth 2017). Such should not come as a surprise, because a godlike cult of personality is, to varying degrees, an inherent feature of Marxist-socialist dictatorships (see Stalin and Mao). How tragically ironic that an ideology that in theory promises a worker’s paradise, power to the people, collective ownership, and a classless society is in practice the cruelest, most oppressive, and most murderous system of government the world has ever seen—a system where human beings are stripped of all individual rights and practically reduced to slaves of the godlike state.

DIAGRAM OF THE SCALE

Figure 1 gives a diagram of the scale of statism. Though countries today are statist economies, the degree to which they are statist varies notably. The middle point in figure 1 indicates the position of developed economies and much of the world. Western governments have been on a long walk from free-market capitalism toward ever more paternalistic, intrusive, and onerous state interventions. Using the United States—the leading and still by far the largest economy—as a reference, one could argue that the 2008 global financial crisis was the point at which developed economies went past the mixed economy/social market economy and started gravitating toward economic fascism.

FIGURE 1: THE SCALE OF STATISM



The socioeconomic systems of the developing world vary from 3 (mixed economy) to 5 (democratic socialism), with a few remaining cases of 6 (Marxist socialist regimes; e.g., North Korea, Cuba, and Eritrea). The socioeconomic systems of most developing countries lie between 3 (mixed economy) and 4 (economic fascism). Stage 4 is most likely in countries that were part of the USSR and the wider Soviet bloc and still have authoritarian or semi-authoritarian governments. Countries like Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Czech Republic have significantly scaled back their planned socialist economies after the collapse of the USSR. Others, however, such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Belarus, perhaps not so much. But before pointing out the situation in others' houses, the author will point it out in his own house, Angola.

From independence from Portugal in 1975 to 1992, Angola, for that period the People's Republic of Angola, was a Marxist-socialist economy under a one-party state dictatorship. Angola's

socialist system was essentially modeled after Soviet socialism, as the ruling party's ideology was Marxism-Leninism. Since 1992, Angola has been the Republic of Angola, a multiparty democracy, and the ruling party has abandoned its Marxist-Leninist creed and "adopted" a market economy. Political, social, and economic reforms have undoubtedly been implemented. As a result, Angola is more open, some economic development has been achieved, and the long civil war ended in 2002. However, the country remains under authoritarian rule, as indicated, for example, by a score of 3.3 on a scale where 1 is fully authoritarian and 9 is fully democratic in "Mapped: The State of Global Democracy in 2022" (Amoros, Routley, and Fortin 2022).

The truth of the matter, however, is that Angola is still far from being a market economy. If the United States is not a market economy, imagine Angola. Although no longer a Marxist-Leninist economy, Angola remains a centrally planned, controlled, and commanded economy. The pro-market economy reforms that have been implemented are largely ceremonial and not significant enough to make Angola a market economy. This places Angola at stage 4 (economic fascism), as shown in figure 1. Data from the world's leading economic freedom indexes are telling.

The Fraser Institute's *Economic Freedom of the World: 2022 Annual Report* places Angola in the least free quartile (Gwartney et al. 2022). The Heritage Foundation's *Index of Economic Freedom 2022* indicates that Angola is a mostly unfree economy with a score of 52.6 out of 100 (Miller, Kim, and Roberts 2022). The Cato Institute's *Human Freedom Index 2021* gives Angola a score of 6.09 on a scale of 0 to 10, where societies closer to 10 enjoy greater human freedom (Vásquez et al. 2021). The regime still maintains tight (and partisan) control of the entire state apparatus and directs nearly all aspects of economic, social, and cultural life.

Angola is not the only society in Africa or in the world whose socioeconomic system is *unwittingly* fascist. While the government of Angola may know it is repressive and authoritarian, it does not know that the socioeconomic system it maintains is fascist, as indicated on the scale of statism. Most societies worldwide that live under authoritarian regimes, post-communist states or not, do not realize that they may have an economically fascist system.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article presented the scale of statism, a framework for understanding and ranking socioeconomic systems, and demonstrated that today's economies are statist, not capitalist, contrary to academic and popular belief. The six socioeconomic systems on the scale are free-market capitalism, crony capitalism, mixed economy, economic fascism, democratic socialism, and Marxist socialism. As explained, statist systems can vary notably in nature and composition, and some can be quite a strange cocktail of statist concepts.

The common denominator, however, is that statist systems are inherently cruel and oppressive. Differences lie only in the degree of harshness: the extent to which the state represses and violates individual natural rights to life, liberty, and (self and property) ownership in maintaining a centralized system of control, command, and intervention. The further a socioeconomic system deviates from free-market capitalism, the more unjust, cruel, and oppressive it becomes. Consequently, the most crucial and overarching question about socioeconomic systems should be this: To what extent does this or that socioeconomic system violate or uphold these three fundamental individual rights?

Acknowledging that existing economies are statist, not capitalist, is an essential starting point if economic perception and understanding are to significantly improve toward freer, more just, more prosperous, and more peaceful societies. The alternative means that authoritarian and tyrannical models may remain prevalent. As a framework for understanding and ranking socioeconomic systems, the scale of statism contributes to more ethical and sounder socioeconomic thought for greater liberty, dignity, justice, and prosperity.

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